Legend Of Voracious Bear Based On Fact

By Ernie J. Hodel

Some two ago we received a very nice letter from a 79-year-old resident of Buckeye, up in Pocahontas County between Millpoint and Marlinton if memory does not fail us. He is F. W. Ruckman.

This octogenarian wrote, "Your paper seems to be gaining much favor in my country. I've heard it said that to learn what is going on in Pocahontas we should read the Beckley Post-Herald."

"I am intrigued by the historical articles by Shirley Donnelly.

"Just recently I found written proof of a legend I have heard all my life and am sending it along. If you find it of interest, you are welcome to use it."

The truth is that we do find the account of more than passing interest. Since it is somewhat long for a day's column, we are taking the liberty of splitting it into two sections and using it herein.

We have been saving it for use at this time — we are on vacation this week — and will write Reader F. W. Ruckman as soon as possible on our return to the office and normal duties. We want to get from him additional information on another subject about which he has written. It seems that he has had a great personal experience during his life which may also merit telling in the columns of the Post-Herald.

But now to the story of a Pocahontas County legend — a legend of bear country which has been shown to have some basis in fact. Though the written record is only a mere condensation of a tragic event, the details supplied are those which have been handed down by word of mouth among Pocahontas people.

By F. W. Ruckman

A legend, hoary with age, old as the hills, and the only one of its kind in our state, so far as I have been able to learn was recorded by no less an authority than Bishop Francis Asbury.

My son, who learned to read and write, got on there recently and went on a journey up to the settlement at Morgantown. There he saw in the Bishop Asbury's three-volume journal some facts about things that happened right here in the Buckeye region of Pocahontas County.

The legend is that some one hundred and sixty-seven years ago a bear came into a clearing where a man was working in the field and carried off and ate a child.

Naturally details became hazy after so great a time, causing arguments as to the name of the family, the exact location, and some even doubted that it ever happened. My interest was rekindled when I read Bishop Asbury's Journal entry and I set out to learn what the story behind it was.

Mrs. Ed Bushell, who was raised on the Cochran farm at the mouth of Buckeye Run, told me of what a well-educated girl from the scene of the tragedy told the present version. Her mother, was a cousin, once removed, of the two grandparents, Mary Cackley.

The name of the family, they remembered, was Taylor. The young parents had built a log cabin on a rolling bench of a low gap in the mountain. He had cleared a field and was plowing it in the spring with a homemade bull-tongue plow.

Mrs. Taylor was a "social person" in her father, coming to be invited, took the baby along to the frolic. The day was warm and sunny. The child was left in a cradle-quilt and where the latter could see it as he passed by while at work.

At one moment, while the husband-father saw a large bear carrying the screaming child into the forest.

The father's frantic calls were heard by the Cochrans, an Irish immigrant family, who had settled at the foot of the mountain a short time before. Pursuit and search revealed some fragments of clothing and eight teeth of the child on Little Mountain, about two miles distant.

The Naylors must have left the country soon afterward, since I find no other mention of the name.

BECKLEY, W. VA., THURSDAY MORNING, OCTOBER 17, 1957

People Rushed From Here After Bear, Stolen Child

This is a picture of the Cochran house, located in Pocahontas County, Pocahontas is the setting for a legend dealing with a bear. The full legend is recounted in the Top O' The Morning column on this page. The narrative and this picture were provided by F. W. Ruckman of Buckeye. Ruckman reports the farm and house were purchased by Daniel I. Cochran in 1855, and have been in possession of the Ruckman clan ever since. He comments on the removal of the said house as follows: "It (the house) should have been preserved as a monument to the pioneers, who with faith, powder, an axe, and intestinal fortitude, carved out of the wilderness by the farms, built comfortable homes; left us a rich heritage which we should nourish and perpetuate."

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Naturally details became foggy after so great a time, causing argument as to the name of the family, the exact location, and some even doubted that it ever happened. My interest was rekindled when I read Bishop Asbury's journal entry and I set out to learn what the story boiled down to.

Mrs. Ed Boblett, who was raised on the opposite side of the mountain from me, and both of us about a crow-measured mile from the scene of the tragedy, had the clearest version. Her mother was a natural born historian, as was her great-aunt, Mary Cackley.

The name of the family, they remembered, was Naylor. The young pioneer had built a little cabin on a rolling bench in a low gap in the mountain. He had cleared a field and was plowing it in the spring with a homemade bull-tongue plow.

Mrs. Naylor was "feelin' poorly," so the father, wishing to be helpful, took the child along to the field. The day was warm and sunny. The child was left in a comfortable spot where the father could see it as he passed by while at work.

All was peaceful until the horrified father saw a large bear carrying the screaming child into the forest.

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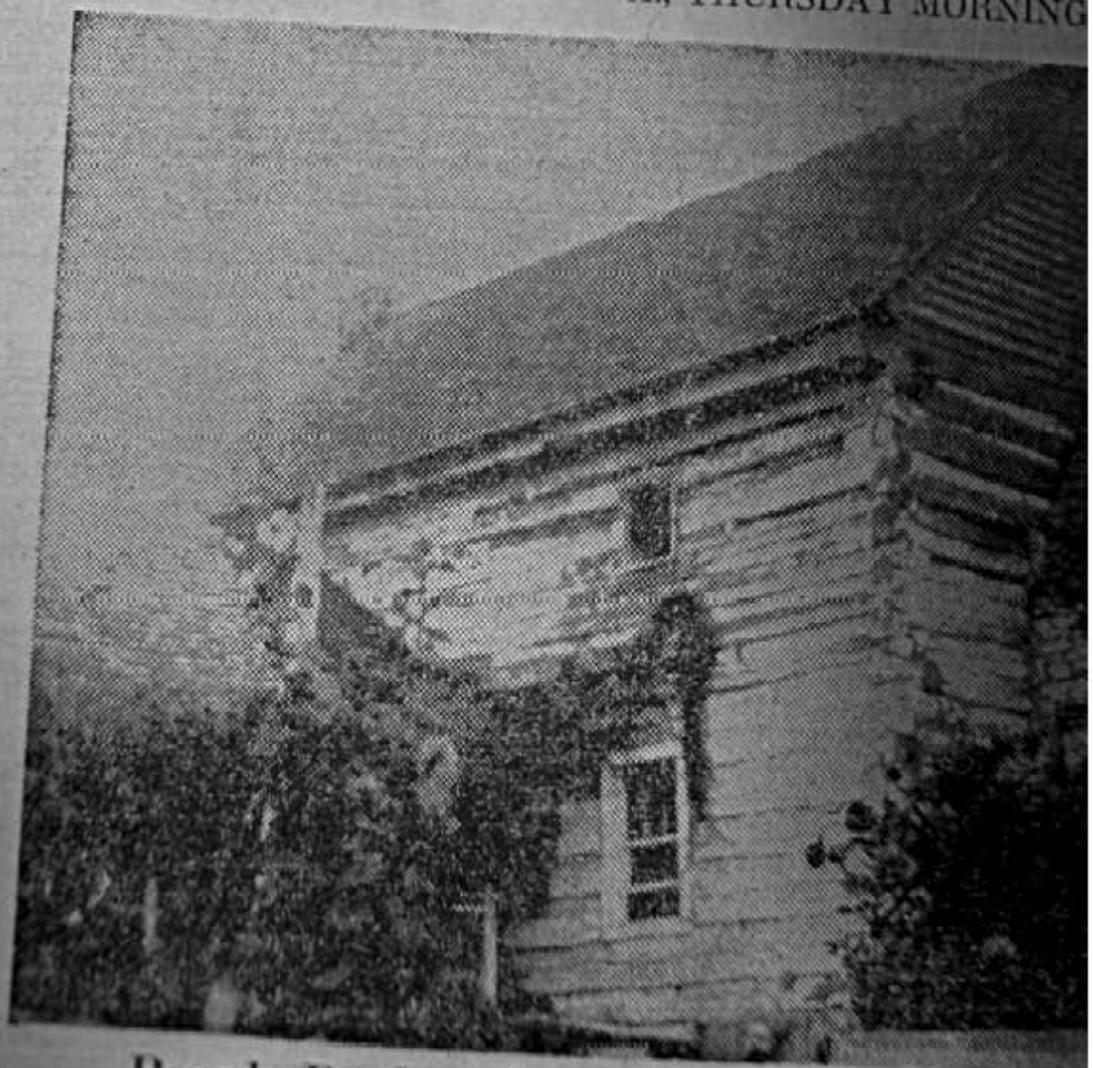
BUCKLEY, W. VA., THURSDAY MORNING



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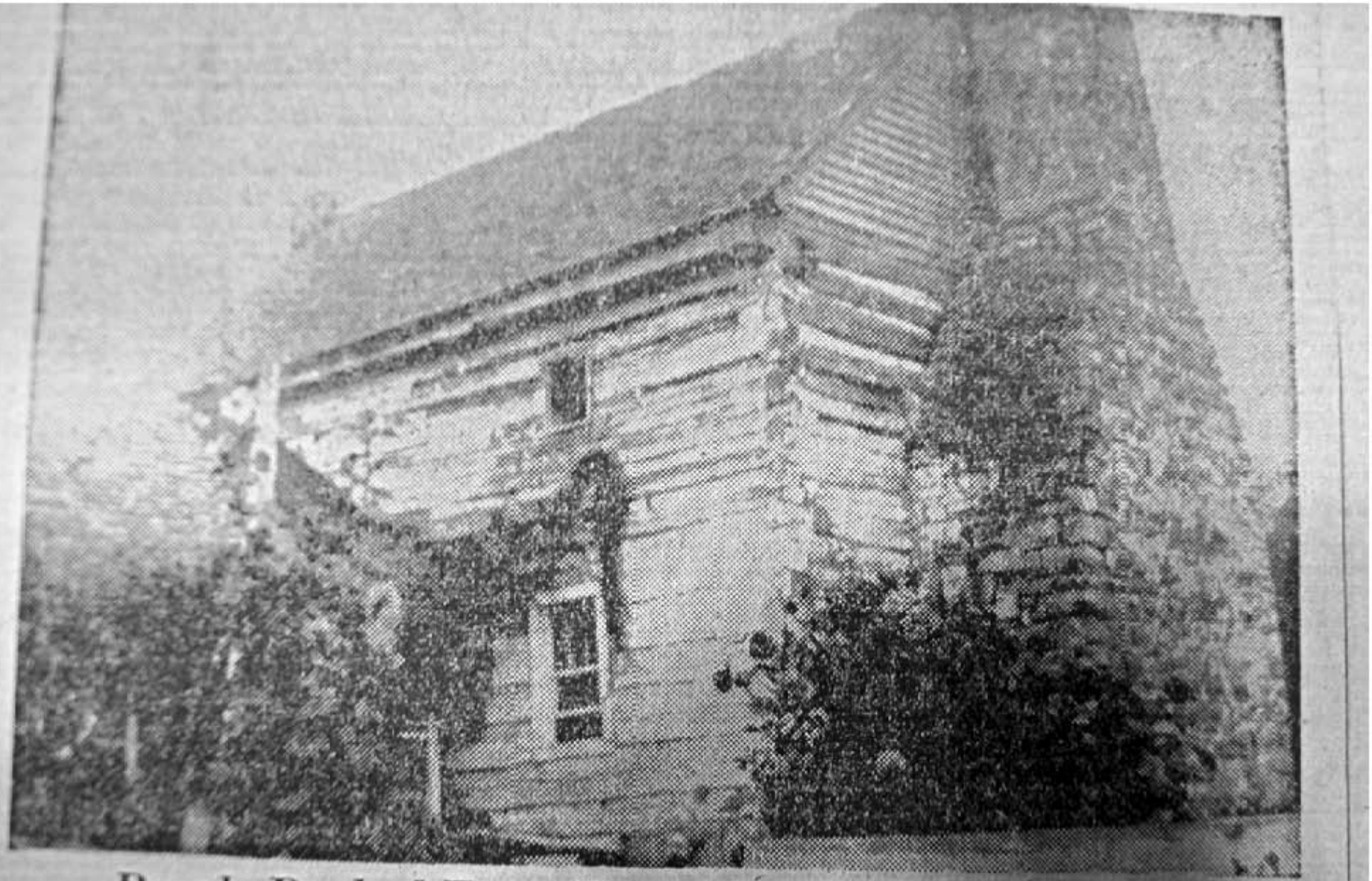

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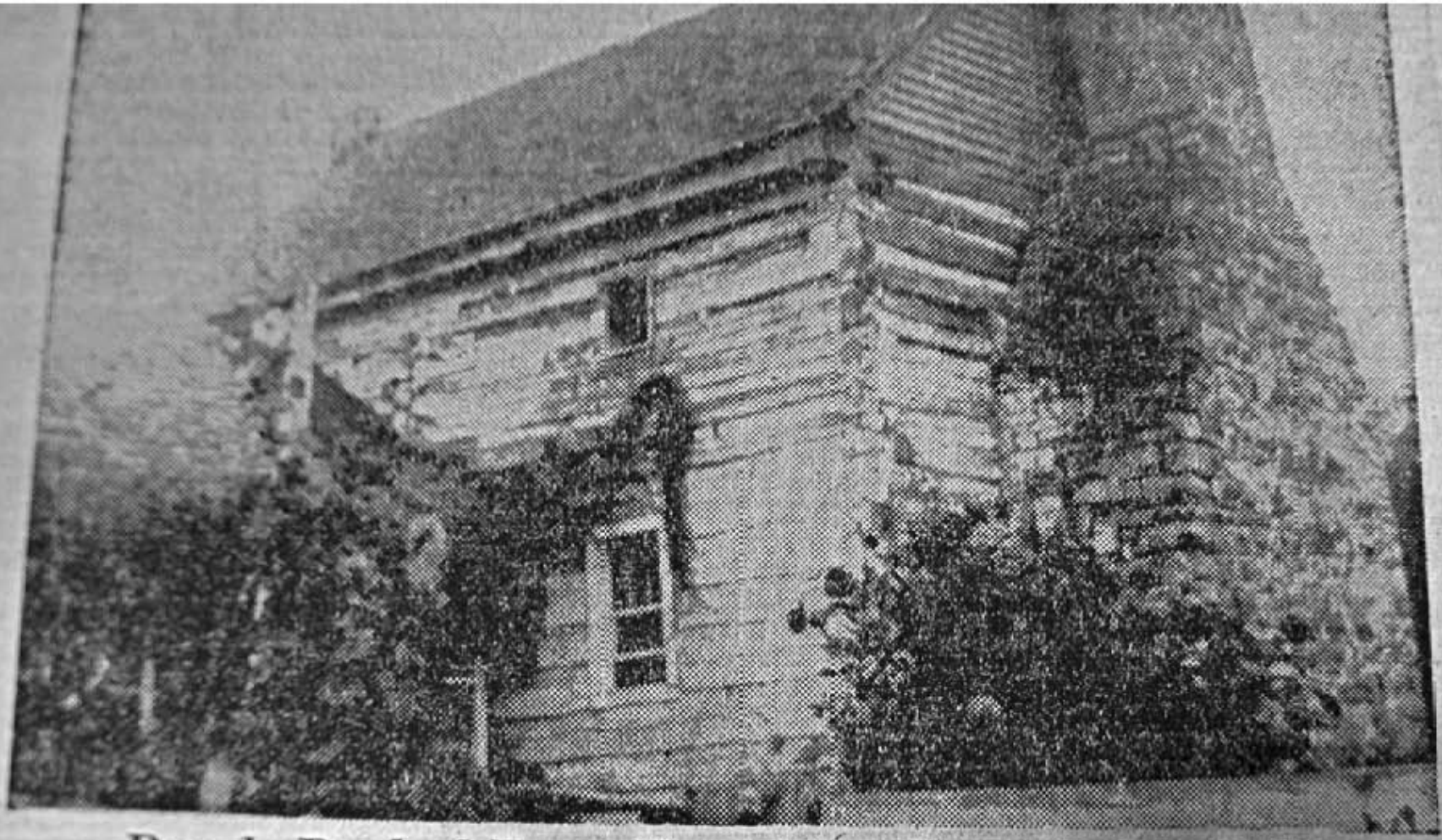

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